

2004 Initiatives



Education

**Reforming the
Public Education
System**

Quality education is the most valuable gift one generation can give to the next. Every culture values education because it holds the key to success, not only for individuals and families but for society as a whole. That is why education is my administration's top priority.

Education gives us the tools we need to reach our full potential as individuals.

Education imparts the knowledge we need to pursue a career and earn a good living.

Education enables us to understand and participate in our great American democracy, and appreciate the cultures and systems in other countries.



And a quality education system provides both the entrepreneurs and workers needed to build new businesses and create jobs that will sustain our economy and a high standard of living for years to come.

Over the course of several decades, however, the state's public school system has failed to provide a quality education for our children. A lot of effort has been spent recently trying to understand why our schools are failing.

The problem is not our students. They are capable of excellence.

The problem is not our teachers. They are among the most highly qualified and committed in the nation.

The problem is not money. Hawai'i spends \$1.9 billion a year supporting our public school system, which is half of our General Fund budget. We rank 14th in the nation in spending on schools.

The real problem we face, and the one we can do something about during this legislative session, is that our school system is structured in a way that just doesn't work for the children.

We need local school boards instead of the current state bureaucracy.

Citizens Achieving Reform in Education



I CARE

Numerous reports have been published on Hawai'i's public school system. All point to the same problem – the way decisions get made. The Department of Education (DOE) decides how all resources are spent, resulting in only 49 cents of each dollar reaching the classroom. This centralized department is too far removed from the schools to respond effectively to actual teacher and student needs.

Last September I appointed 25 community leaders to a committee that helped me prepare education reform recommendations. Called CARE (Citizens Achieving Reform in Education), the committee is comprised of traditional and charter school principals, teachers, business leaders, a former DOE

official, a teacher's union official, a member of the State Board of Education and parents.

CARE conducted a series of community meetings across the state. Committee members and expert consultants examined prior reports on our educational system.

CARE also commissioned an independent study of school finances. The study found that in 2002, \$10,422 per student was spent on public education—almost \$8,500 on operations alone.



CARE concluded that the structure of public education in Hawai'i is ineffective. It is important to note that we are the only state in the nation where all decisions are made by a single, statewide board of education.

Teachers, students and parents have suffered decades of ineffective, centralized decision making that results in test scores ranking us at or near the bottom of the nation. These facts, coupled with past failures to fix the system, point to the obvious conclusion that it is time to stop tinkering and instead take the bold step of restructuring our school system by voting for local school boards.



Legislative Initiatives

I call upon every legislator to enthusiastically support:

- Placing a constitutional amendment on the November 2004 ballot enabling the voters of Hawai'i to decide if they want to establish local school boards or if they want to allow our current failing system to continue.

- Putting more money into the schools through a weighted student formula that assigns an amount of money to each student based on his or her specific education needs. If we switch to this system, up to 90% of operating funds could go directly to the schools.
- Empowering principals to function as true leaders. Principals should be expected to maintain the confidence of teachers, parents and staff and be held accountable for student success – much as CEOs are held accountable for the success of their companies.
- Establishing a Statewide Education Standards and Accountability Board, as many other states have done. This board would be tasked with maintaining rigorous standards and fairly allocating funds to all schools in the state.



- Providing public charter schools with fair and adequate funding for operations and facilities, along with lifting the cap on new start-up charter schools.
- Increasing discipline by asking the legislature to give teachers more authority to remove disruptive students from their classrooms.

My goal is to have these six education initiatives implemented by the fall of 2005. Some have suggested that we are moving too fast. I believe it is time to move forward with great determination. This is an ambitious timetable, but one we can meet to ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed.

Additional Funding for Schools

In addition to these major legislative initiatives, we have included in a budget submission to the legislature:

- \$90 million in capital improvement funds addressing basic repairs and maintenance at schools. Hawai'i's school facilities have suffered from years of neglect, despite

citizen-led efforts to improve them. Leaking roofs, falling walkways, inoperable rest rooms and faulty fire alarm systems are a few examples.



- \$211,000 for additional security attendants, particularly at schools where enrollment has increased. Students and teachers need to feel safe on campus. Anything less is not conducive to learning.
- \$480,000 to pay teachers who achieve certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Teachers who reach this level of achievement deserve to be recognized and rewarded.

- Transfers and additional funding totaling \$25.9 million for Hawai‘i’s charter schools. This per-pupil money is critical to the success of charter schools as independent learning centers.
- \$1 million to buy books for our libraries. This will be augmented with \$500,000 in federal funds to improve high technology resources in our libraries.
- \$3.5 million to enhance the A+ after-school program.
- \$1 million for supplies for school restroom facilities statewide.

